



**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

**April 6, 2006**

**For immediate release**

- 1. Countdown to CRP, ends April 14**
- 2. CRP signup ends April 14**
- 3. Lightning strike leads to wastewater bypass**
- 4. Trumbull Lake residents asked for input on water quality improvement plan**

## **COUNTDOWN TO CRP, ENDS APRIL 14**

### *Landowner Decisions Will Affect Iowa's Water Quality*

DES MOINES – How landowners respond to conservation reserve program (CRP) offers on one-half million acres of the state's most fragile cropland has big implications for the future of Iowa's water quality.

The program pays rent to farmers who convert cropland to grass or woodlands. More than 500,000 acres of the state's cropland are currently under CRP contracts that expire in September of 2007. Contract holders have until April 14 to make a decision that can protect their land from erosion while improving water quality and wildlife habitat, or to return the land to crops such as corn and soybeans.

"More than half of these 8,804 expiring contracts cover some of the most environmentally sensitive land in the state," said Lyle Asell, special assistant for agriculture at the DNR. "Whether this land stays in the conservation reserve or returns to cropland will affect erosion rates, wildlife habitat and water quality throughout the state."

Also by April 14, other landowners have the opportunity to enroll for the first time or to re-enroll contracts expiring in September of 2006. Eligibility for CRP hinges on two important factors: cutting soil erosion and improving water quality. Priority is given to land that is highly erodible or that allows water to percolate through easily, leaching out nutrients. Priority is also given to land in North Central Iowa, the Prairie Pothole Region, where restoring wetlands benefits waterfowl and water quality.

## **CRP Cuts Soil Erosion, Improves Water Quality**

While the effect of CRP on soil erosion rates have not been documented statewide, the potential effects of returning CRP grasslands to cropland have been studied in the rolling hills of Southeast Iowa. Whether farmers continue with CRP contracts or bring land back into crop production has big implications for Iowa's largest rural water supply, the Rathbun Regional Water Association (RRWA) near Centerville.

"Most sediment and phosphorus that enter our waters are coming from a fraction of the land," said Marty Braster, Environmental Management Specialist with the RRWA.

"About three-fourths of the sediment and phosphorus coming into the lake come from just 17 percent of the land area."

Braster believes that targeting the most erosive land and stopping erosion at the source can help protect the Rathbun water supply for nearly 11,000 rural families. CRP plays an important part in that strategy.

"About 25 percent of the land in CRP right now would be the source of 50 percent of the sediment and phosphorus reaching the lake if it were returned to cropland," said Braster.

Installing conservation practices such as terraces can be quite expensive. However, Braster said that the soil loss estimates are very conservative, based on the assumption that landowners returning CRP to cropland would farm with conservation methods. In fact, if producers decide to return highly erodible land to crop production, they must follow a conservation plan or forfeit their eligibility for USDA benefits.

Even with conservation practices in place, when land is converted from grassland or trees to cropland, there is an increase in the runoff of soil, and potentially an increase in fertilizers and pesticides.

"It is a huge potential problem," Braster said. He added that landowners have indicated a much higher willingness to re-enroll their land in CRP than anticipated, with about half saying that they would re-enroll at current rental rates.

Asell added that, "Soil is our greatest natural resource. Once it erodes and becomes sediment in our waters, it becomes our greatest pollutant."

## **CRP Benefits Wildlife**

Planting grass or trees on erosive or poor cropland also increases nesting and brood areas for wildlife. In the prairie pothole regions of the Upper Midwest, waterfowl production on CRP land produces an estimated 2.2 million ducks per year.

For grassland bird species throughout the Midwest, when CRP fields are compared with nearby row crop fields during breeding seasons, from 1.4 to 10.5 times more birds are found in the CRP fields. A study in Nebraska showed CRP fields had 16 bird species that

were either unique or substantially more abundant when compared with nearby crop fields. While grassland nesters like dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks and Henslow's sparrow have benefited from CRP grasslands, the program also yields more game birds such as pheasant, quail and wild turkey.

### **For More Information**

Call 515-281-5918 for the name of a DNR biologist or forester near you. Or, log on to [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com). More information on CRP is also available at your local FSA office or on the FSA Web site at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) under conservation programs.

**For media inquiries, contact Kelly Smith, Iowa DNR, at 515-281-6247.**

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## **CRP SIGN-UP ENDS APRIL 14**

DES MOINES – The last day to enroll cropland into the general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is April 14. This is also the last day to re-enroll or extend contracts that expire in 2007.

Landowners who are interested in keeping land in CRP or in signing up their environmentally sensitive cropland, should contact their local Farm Services Agency office soon.

The contracts offer guaranteed payments on marginal land where yields are typically lower than on land more suitable for cropping. Cost-share is also available to help establish permanent vegetative cover on new contracts.

Landowners must compete against other landowners nationwide for the new contracts. The DNR has biologists and foresters who can help landowners identify the land that is eligible and the combination of vegetation that will be most competitive during the sign-up.

Landowners who choose to plant trees, or a combination of prairie grasses and wildflowers are the most likely to be accepted into new CRP contracts, as they protect water quality and increase cover for wildlife.

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## **LIGHTNING STRIKE LEADS TO WASTEWATER BYPASS**

FAIRFIELD — Lightning struck a Fairfield lift station early Thursday, leading to a power outage and wastewater bypass.

The power outage set off an alarm at 5:53 a.m. Thursday at the southwest lift station. Power was restored and the bypass ended around 6 a.m. The city estimates about 1,000 gallons entered an unnamed tributary to Cedar Creek.

Steam flows are high and will help to dilute the wastewater. The city has taken water samples.

The city is also planning to make improvements to this lift station this year.

**For more information, contact Jim Sievers at (319) 653-2135.**

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## **TRUMBULL LAKE RESIDENTS ASKED FOR INPUT ON WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

DES MOINES – The DNR will present plans for improving water quality at Trumbull Lake in Clay County at a public meeting April 20. The draft water quality improvement plan will be discussed at 6 p.m. at Oneota Lodge, located at 420 10th Ave SE in Spencer.

The draft plan, also known as a TMDL or Total Maximum Daily Load, has been developed for Trumbull Lake. TMDLs are calculations used to determine how much of a pollutant a water body can receive and still maintain water quality standards.

The water quality improvement plan also includes information on how water quality can be improved through conservation efforts in the watershed, or the surrounding area that drains into the lake. After receiving public comments, the draft plan will be forwarded to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for final approval.

The water quality problems at Trumbull Lake are related to algae and turbidity, or cloudy water. These problems are associated with excessive nutrient loading, especially from phosphorus. Sediment and nutrients in Trumbull Lake are coming from agricultural lands in the watershed and are also being stirred up from within the lake to cause water quality problems. Excess nutrients make the lake aesthetically objectionable and less desirable for uses like swimming, but do not pose a specific human health threat.

Comments on the draft plan will be received through May 5, 2006. Copies of the draft plan are available from the following sources, which can also be used to submit comments:

- Internet: [www.iowadnr.com/water/tmdlwqa/tmdl/publicnotice.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/water/tmdlwqa/tmdl/publicnotice.html)
- E-mail [chris.vangorp@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:chris.vangorp@dnr.state.ia.us)

- Telephone: Chris Van Gorp at (515) 281-4791
- Mail: Chris Van Gorp, care of Iowa DNR, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, Iowa 50319

**For more information, contact Chris Van Gorp at (515) 281-4791.**